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ABSTRACT

Prior to the late 1960s, physical education professional preparation programs in the United States were principally concerned with preparing coaches of sport and teachers of physical education. However, in recent decades, the field has spawned a number of alternative career tracks of which none has proven to be more viable than sport management. The field has expanded to 193 institutions that prepare sport managers and administrators on the undergraduate and/or graduate levels in physical education, sport, business, computers, and communications. This digest addresses the history and growth of sport management as a distinct subdiscipline; the rationale for the proliferation of programs; controversies and problems facing sport management; the scope of sport management today; career and employment opportunities; and the future of sport management. (Contains 10 references.) (LL)

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ERIC DIGEST

ALTERNATIVE CAREER PATHS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION: SPORT MANAGEMENT

by

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Alternative Career Paths in Physical Education: Sport Management

William F. Stier, Jr.

Introduction

Prior to the late 1960s, physical education professional preparation programs in the United States were principally concerned with preparing coaches of sport and teachers of physical education. In recent decades, the field has spawned a number of viable alternative career tracks.

The expansion of physical education into alternative career paths has not changed the nature of what physical education is or can be. However, it does drastically change the emphasis of the delivery system and expands the potential constituencies that the profession will serve in the future (Stier, 1986).

None of the alternative career options have proven to be more viable than has sport management. Beginning in 1966 with but a single master's program established at Ohio University, the field has expanded to 193 institutions that prepare sport managers and administrators on the undergraduate and/or graduate levels (NASSM/NASPE, 1993).

Current and future job demands on the sport professional necessitate that the individual possess a depth of knowledge and a broad range of specific competencies in business and in sport to be able to deal successfully with ever changing challenges and problems associated with the business of sport. This Digest will address the history and growth of sport management as a distinct subdiscipline; reasons behind this growth; controversies and problems; the scope of sport management today; and the future of sport management. The information should be useful to students contemplating a career in physical education or its subdisciplines, physical education teachers or fitness professionals considering career change, and university faculty involved in curriculum development.

History and Growth of Sport Management

The initial impetus for sport management developing into a distinct academic discipline can be traced to Walter O'Malley, then president of the Brooklyn Dodgers. In 1957, O'Malley voiced his concern with Dr. James G. Mason about the lack of formal education programs for individuals desiring to work in professional baseball. Almost a decade later, 1966, Dr. Mason, who was then a professor at Ohio University, was instrumental in establishing the first master's degree program in sport management at that university (J. G. Mason, personal communication, January 23, 1990).

By 1978 there were 20 sport management graduate programs identified in this country (Parkhouse, 1978). In addition, three undergraduate programs had surfaced by that time. Today there are a total of 193 colleges and universities offering undergraduate/graduate programs in sport management or athletic administration (NASSM/NASPE, 1993). Five are doctoral degree programs. In 1993 the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) and the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) approved standards and protocol for accrediting sport management preparation programs, a process that will begin in 1994.

Rationale for the Proliferation of Programs

There have been a variety of interrelated reasons behind the accelerated and sustained growth in sport management professional preparation programs (Stier, 1986):

- an effort to meet a real, recognizable need for professionally trained administrators in the broad area of sport;
- a natural outgrowth of the study of sport, combined with the view that physical education is a broad-based academic discipline;
- fewer students seeking to become physical education teachers, an overabundance of would-be physical education teachers already seeking jobs, the reduction in requirements for daily physical education in many school systems;
- a conscious effort by professionals within higher education to save jobs of physical education professors (as fewer students pursue traditional physical education as a major), by providing an alternative academic career path; and
- additional colleges and universities jumping on the "sport management bandwagon" once they realized that such programs could attract significant numbers of students.

Controversies and Problems Facing Sport Management

The phenomenal growth associated with sport management has not been without controversies, challenges, and problems. Even the name of the discipline has come under close scrutiny in its brief history. Many terms are used interchangeably to describe the profession, such as sport(s) or athletic management, sport(s) business or administration, and athletic administration. Although there isn't consensus in terminology, the purpose of programs remains essentially the same: to prepare future sport professionals, other than teachers and coaches, for careers in the world of sport (Parkhouse, 1991; Bridges & Roquemore, 1992).

Other challenges and controversies include:

- a lack of consistency in terms of the depth and breadth of the curricular programs, with some schools offering an emphasis, a concentration, or specialization, while others provide a minor or a major;
- a need for faculty simultaneously to possess meaningful, practical experience in the real world of sport and the ability to be scholars within the discipline;

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- a lack of consensus in terms of where sport management should be housed on the college level—physical education, business, or a separate academic entity altogether;
- a lack of agreement whether sport management should be offered at the undergraduate level or should be the exclusive domain of the graduate level; and
- a danger of saturating the field with highly trained professionals seeking a limited number of vacancies (many with a low salary).

Scope of Sport Management

The basis of most sport management professional preparation programs revolves around an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach. Fields of study such as physical education, sport, business, computers, and communications are all intricately intertwined in the preparation of future sport managers and administrators. In fact, Sutton (1989) refers to sport management as a hybrid field of study in that it encompasses so many other disciplines.

Sport management programs can prepare students to become generalists or specialists. The professional preparation curriculum typically consists of three basic components:

Cognate or foundation classes, which are related to the discipline of sport management and can include courses in communications; interpersonal relations; business; accounting; finance; economics; statistics; and the historical, sociological, psychological, kinesiological, and philosophical perspectives of sport (Stier, 1993).

Specialty or major courses, which are the core, applied courses geared specifically to sport management (Brassie, 1989). Examples include introduction to sport management, sport management theory, sport marketing, fundraising, promotions, public relations, ethics in sport management, legal aspects of sport, facility planning and management, computer applications to sport, research methods, sport management problems and issues, and risk management.

Field experience, which is included in almost all undergraduate and graduate programs (Sutton, 1989). This may take the form of a practicum or internship. A practicum is usually a preinternship, part-time field experience taken while the student is still pursuing cognate or specialty classes. An internship is taken when all or a majority of specialty and cognate courses have been completed. This experience is usually full-time, and the student is expected to provide meaningful assistance to the intern site. The internship is the quintessential learning experience for the sport management student (National Association, 1987).

Career and Employment Opportunities

An estimate was made in 1991 that there existed approximately 4.5 million sports jobs at all levels in the United States. These were in marketing (1.5 million), entrepreneurship (1.15 million), administration (500,000), representation (370,000), media (300,000), and other sports-related areas (720,000) (Markiewicz, 1991).

Although there are seemingly a wealth of job opportunities in sport, the competition for these positions has been and will remain severe. And, many of these positions involve extremely low pay in comparison to the amount of work expected. Career paths in sport management can include athletic team management, finance, sports medicine/athletic training, journalism, broadcasting, public relations, development and fund raising, sports information, facility management, cardiovascular fitness and wellness administration, aquatics management, among others.

The Future of Sport Management

Sport is big business today and will remain so in the future. In fact, sports revenues are approaching the $70 billion mark in the United States. As a result, there is an ever increasing need for professionals trained in the managerial, administrative, and business aspects of sport (Stier, 1993).

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